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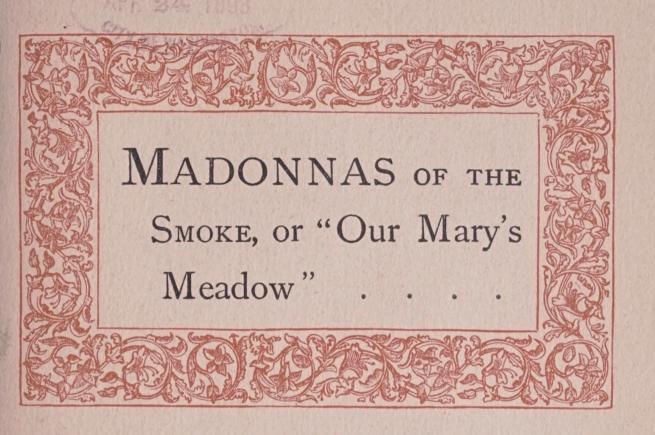
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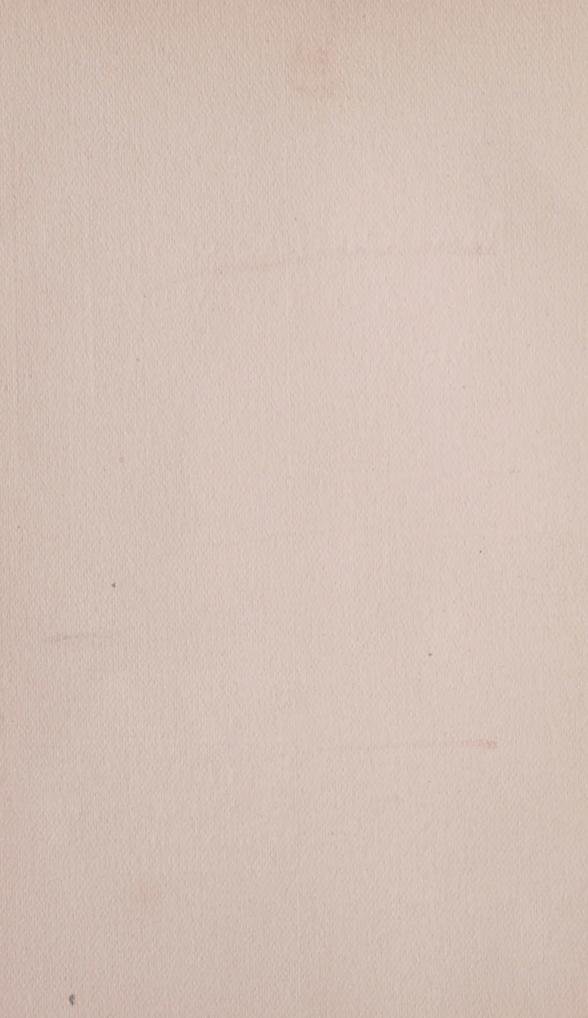


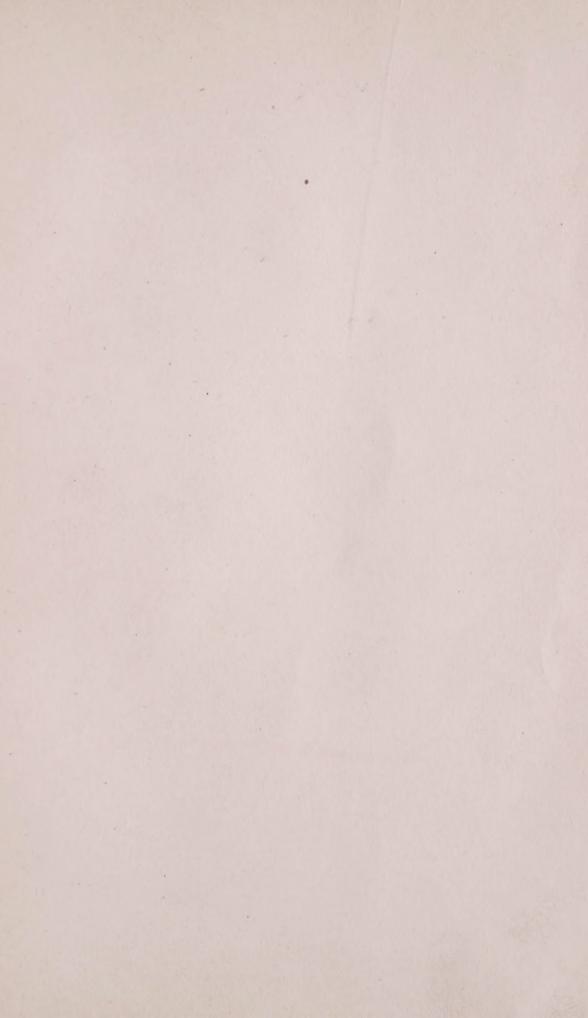






EMILY MALBONE MORGAN AUTHOR OF "A POPPY GARDEN" "A LITTLE WHITE SHADOW," ETC.







MADONNAS OF THE SMOKE

OR OUR

"MARY'S MEADOW"

BY

EMILY MALBONE MORGAN

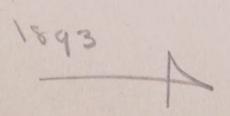
AUTHOR OF "A LITTLE WHITE SHADOW," "A POPPY GARDEN"
"PRIOR RAHERE'S ROSE"

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TO

HOUSE-MOTHER LENA

AND

ALL DEAR GIRL FRIENDS OF "HEARTSEASE"



Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,

Ere the sorrow comes with years?

They are leaning their young heads against their

mothers,

And that cannot stop their tears.

The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;

The young birds are chirping in their nest;

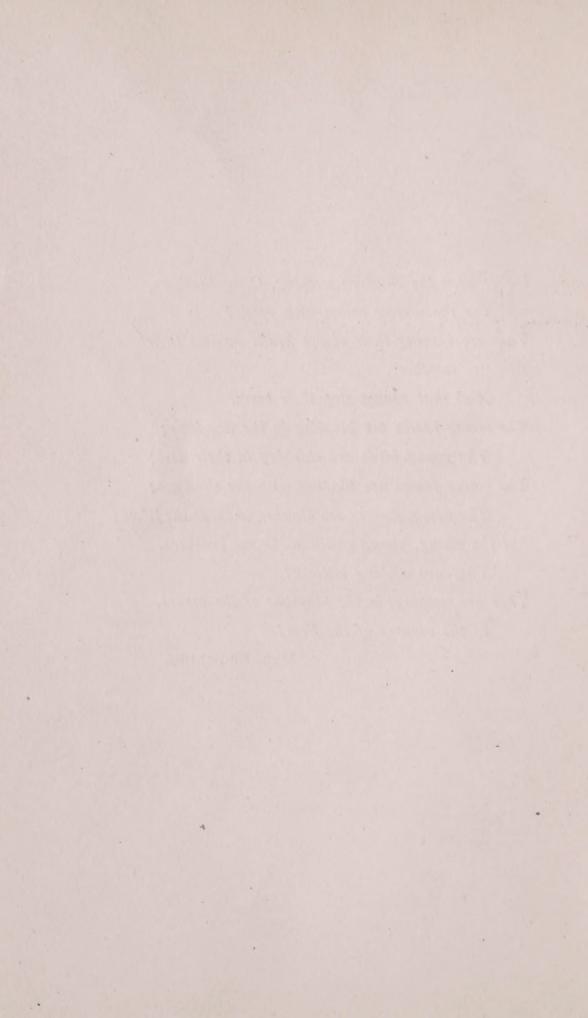
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;

The young flowers are blowing towards the West;

But the young, young children, O my brothers, They are weeping bitterly!

They are weeping, in the playtime of the others, In the country of the Free!

MRS. BROWNING.



NOTE.

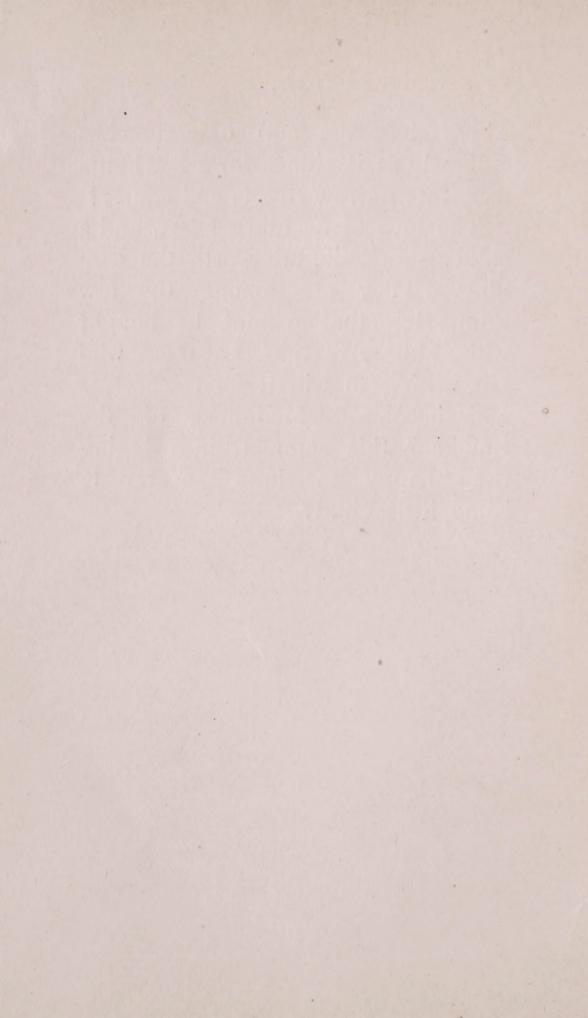
IN childish days we believed in fairies lurking under every leaf and flower. In later life this belief may have developed into something stronger, and we feel that a holier spirit broodeth over the face of Nature, and that the nearer we live to its heart, the nearer we live in reality to the heart of God. This is a season of the year when those who are specially interested in vacation and Fresh Air Work are not made altogether happy by the world waking like the Sleeping Beauty at the kiss of the Spring into the fulness of its resurrection life, because every flower, bud, and green leaf seems to say, "You have us always. There are some who never have us at all."

Fresh Air funds there are in abundance, but those who are interested in this work are always, like hungry Olivers, crying for more; for they alone know of the many who are left behind, as well as of those who go to seashore and country. It is, therefore, to the strong we would plead the cause of the weak, - of the little children in our cities, - and beg of every one who may read this that if he do nothing else, he will give some child at least an hour's pleasure this coming summer. To us it may mean very little, - only an extra effort; to them it may mean a happy memory for years. If we have ever felt ourselves the uplift of purer air, if God has spoken to us in the music of woodlands, of mountain breezes, or the murmur of breaking waves, what conception do we suppose those can have of Him, or of a better country, who never see Nature as it is, and

whose lives the sun only touches obliquely as it shines for a few hours daily into narrow streets and courts?

The love of a child's heart, and a child's gratitude, are worth the winning. They are among the few things left that cannot be bought with gold. Are there not more who are willing to win it for themselves and become "Madonnas of the Smoke" this summer, in bringing the "happy meadows" nearer to some little child?

E. M. M.



MADONNAS OF THE SMOKE.

I.

MRS. EWING, that dearly beloved of English story-writers for children, once wrote a charming story called "Mary's Meadow," full of quaint child-life and the lovely flowers of an English spring; but this is the story of quite another "meadow," named "Mary's Meadow" by girls who probably never heard of Mrs. Ewing or her stories, for they were the busy girls of a large manufacturing city, who had formed themselves into a club. They first began by meeting in one of the downstairs rooms of an old factory; and as they shared their large quarters until autumn with the birds of the air who had built their nests in the recesses of the

windows, many of which were paneless, they did not pay rent for it any more than their feathered brothers who had taken possession without asking leave.

When they numbered thirty, they had a consultation one day, and decided to start their club on a co-operative basis. They found that if they each paid twenty cents a month towards expenses, they could hire a room. This they accordingly did, in their own part of the city, down among the smoke and blackness of the great iron foundries, and furnished it at first with one chair and a table. Gradually each one, as she could afford it, made some addition. One girl painted the floor, another put up curtains of blue basket cloth at the windows. Then they had some shelves placed in the corner, where each one owned a plate and cup and saucer; lastly, they painted their table to resemble Jacob's coat of many colors, and purchased a lamp with a gorgeous blue shade to stand on it. This

was all, but they were as proud of it as if it were a palace of the Cæsars.

The city in which they lived presented a great parable of life in its different phases. Its principal street ran like a huge artery through the middle, dividing it into two separate and distinct cities; and if it had been sunk between precipices, it could not have been a deeper gulf. On one side was a city of quiet, cultured homes, beautiful gardens and residences; on the other side, bordering on a large river, were great factories and foundries, and the people who worked in them lived in the sooty air and smoke.

It was seldom that these toilers crossed over the main street into the city of beautiful homes. It was still more seldom that the people of the city of beautiful homes crossed over the street and went down into the noise and smoke, save a few men striving, like all the rest down there, for the 'mighty dollar. Even the

churches of each city kept their own side of the street. That was some years ago. Some one who has come from there recently says this is all changed now. Then, however, the people of the city by the black river and the people of the city of green lawns and stately houses never met each other. If they had, life would have been broader and grander for each. As it was, their judgment of one another was one-sided and warped. They glared at each other over the chasm of the dividing main street. The poor blamed the rich for being rich; the rich regarded the poor as something to be tolerated in their midst, and the laborer as a human machine. They condemned one another without knowledge of their need of one another to render their lives in each case more complete.

One evening, shortly after our girls had moved into their new club room, they began talking over winter plans. Most of them longed greatly for more oppor-

tunities of self-improvement, and for some inspiration outside themselves. In discussing different ways and means, they finally settled on having three informal "talks" given at their club-room, provided they could get some one to "talk." The first and only talk, however, that they had that winter was given them by a girl of their own age. She also lived in their "city," as one of their neighbors, and taught a free kindergarten. She had a fair, sweet face, and an air of exquisite refinement about her which had always attracted the girls whenever they had met on their way to and from work. She spoke to them that night on some of the world's great pictures, and illustrated her talk with photographs. The last one she showed them was one of the rarest of Raphael's Madonnas, having in it all the devout feeling of that early Christian art which he learned first from his master Perugino, as a youth among the Umbrian hills, and expressing, above

all other pictures, the sacred and eternal motherhood.

"I am going to leave this picture with you, girls," she said simply, in closing. "When I graduated from the trainingschool where I studied kindergarten work, the senior teacher called all of my class into her room and gave us each a copy of this picture, saying it was her custom to give it to all who left the school, so that whenever we looked at it we might learn the attitude God wanted us all to have as women towards little children; and I have brought you this to hang in your club room, - the picture of Mother and Child, - so you may never misunderstand the tenderness God meant us all to have."

The girls were very much delighted with it, for it was the first present that had ever been given them. They clubbed together and had their picture framed, and hung it over their empty fireplace,—the only thing on the bare walls. The

girl's words, too, had left their impression. Some harsh words and slang phrases, so easy to pick up in the streets sometimes, died on the lips before they were uttered, because of the Divine Child hanging on the wall above them in his mother's arms.

II.

THE winter passed rapidly. The spring came, and from the middle of May the air became stifling. No odor of springtime reached the busy workers through the heavy leaden air; the breath of the great furnaces seemed to be everywhere, and their windows had always to be closed to keep out the black dust. But from those club-room windows the girls could see, on clear days, across the river, which ran muddy and dark near the wharves on their own side, water that sparkled, and green and white laden fruit-trees budding in the sunshine, and fields white with bluettes, or yellow with dandelions and buttercups; and with that vision before them, as of some far-off valley of peace, they could no longer go to their club room evenings. Instead,

they would meet by agreement at the corner of the street, and walk, in groups of twos and threes, some little distance along the river and across a bridge, simply to get a whiff of fresh air after the day's work.

One Sunday evening three of them, more bold than the rest, left the dusty highway and seated themselves under the trees in a beautiful meadow which bordered the river. It was one's ideal meadow, with just enough trees in pleasant groups to make it shady, and with plenty of good, green grass, dotted with flowers. A brook ran through one end of it, and emptied itself into the river farther on, — a little, noisy brook, babbling and singing over smooth, round, pebbly stones, and banked with ferns and moss, in which grew shy, white violets. At the end farthest from the river was a stone wall bordered by cherry and apple trees, and the roof of a house rising above the trees, while behind it was a bit of woodland. All this was within a stone's throw of the high-road and the bridge which they had crossed. They had only to run down a grassy bank to reach it. Few bridges as short as that ever bridged two greater extremes. On the one side was black smoke, rising and curling itself into everlasting question-marks against the heavens; on the other, sunlight and the tender green of springtime, and Life springing anew from the icy grasp of Death.

The girls had been gathering flowers, and they now sat under the trees talking over future plans.

"I wish," said one, "we could have a field like this for our club room this summer."

"Oh, pray don't stop there!" said another; "wish for the moon and a few other impossible things while you are about it."

The third girl said nothing; she only found out, before she went home, the

name of the man who owned the field. A few evenings later in the week she crossed the bridge all by herself, went past the meadow, and lifted the knocker on the front door of the old white house beyond, enshrouded in blossoming trees. A comely, middle-aged woman came to the door, and she inquired for the man of the house. When he appeared in answer he proved to be a very old man with white hair, who, however, still stood erect, and looked around the world with confident eyes, which had still something of the sparkle of youth in them, spite of his eighty years.

The girl introduced herself as Alice Atwater, and asked at once, in a business-like way, for how much he would rent the meadow for the summer. She told him a little of her club, and of how warm it was in their club room now that summer was coming on. He listened incredulously. He belonged to a generation when women did not organize them-

selves into clubs. He had had a daughter once of his own; if she had lived she also might have belonged to a club. He forgot that if she were living she would be gray-haired and over fifty. He only thought of her as a girl as old as this girl when she died, and of how she too might have come walking over the river from the black cloud on the other side, and asked for a meadow to walk in.

"You shall have the medder free," he said.

"But we don't want it free," said the girl. "We can't pay very much, but we can all pay something."

"The birds build their nests in the trees there, the frogs and the fishes live in the brook, and a thousand 'nd one insects live in the grass; they don't pay no rent," said the old man, slowly.

"We are a little superior to them, I hope," answered Alice, smiling.

So they finally settled on a dollar and a half a month, as the old man refused to take more. Then he stood on the doorstep in the evening light, and watched
her sturdy little figure on its homeward
journey till it was lost in the shadow of
the bridge. "Not a good barg'in," he
thought to himself, muttering, as old men
will. "Some folks 'll say I hav' gone ha'fway crazy; but folks o' my time o' life,
with the light o' another world dawnin',
kin make trades where it ain't take all
and give as little as ye kin in return."

III.

A LICE ATWATER, meantime, went back into the stifling atmosphere of the club room on Calvert Street, and told the astounded members of the Madonna Club (for that was what they called themselves after their talk from their girl friend), that she had hired, in their name, a meadow on the other side of the river for the entire summer. Any one passing below in the dark, narrow street that evening must have wondered at the eager voices and joyous laughter which reached them through the open windows of the floor above. The girls could hardly wait for the next day, when they went over in a body and celebrated their first evening of possession with a game of tag; then called on Mr. Welcome (for that

was the old gentleman's name), and simply deafened him with thanks, insisting on prepaying their rent for June.

After they had been in possession of their field a week, they began to notice great changes. They found nice wooden benches and seats under the trees. A great swing appeared under a huge maple, and hammocks were swung in shady nooks, where the branches of two trees met and whispered to each other, and a girl might lie underneath and listen to the birds singing vespers. The girls, when they had made these discoveries, promptly appointed a committee to go and thank old Mr. Welcome, who actually pretended to know nothing about how they had gotten there, and told them to go and ask the birds. A week later they were surprised to see a little rustic house going up in a corner of the field nearest the cherry-trees. It was built of logs, and had a small piazza supported by young cedar trees. The girls

wondered greatly about it, but of course could ask no questions, as Mr. Welcome certainly had a right to build what he liked on his own land. When it was finished, as it was towards the end of June, Mr. Welcome appeared one evening and invited them in. They found a cosey, plainly furnished little sitting-room with a neat closet, in which there was some china, and a small outer room where there was a tiny stove on which the kettle was already boiling. There was a sofa in the sitting-room with plenty of cushions, two or three rocking-chairs, and a centre table spead for afternoon tea. Mr. Welcome took them all over this small domain, and then begged they would accept the use of it for the summer. Alice, in the name of the club, did so graciously, but offered to pay rent, at which he was quite indignant.

"I ha' lived into a time," he said, "when money ain't o' no account. I've got to be paid in some other coin. I'd

rather hear a girl's laugh or a child's voice."

They were independent and rather proud girls, and as a club they fulfilled all the requisitions of the modern working girls' club, for they were self-governing, self-supporting, and co-operative, and had been so from the beginning; but some of them had the finer sense to know that everything cannot be reduced to a dollars-and-cents value, - least of all a girl's laugh or a child's voice, - and so they were willing to accept the loan as it had been made, and to co-operate with Mr. Welcome in giving them a pleasure. It is quite as much of a virtue after all to know how to accept gracefully, as it is to reject help, which, in the end, will make us weakly dependent.

IV.

NE rainy evening shortly after this the Madonna Club had a meeting in their lately much neglected club room. The blue curtains were drawn, and in the centre of their table were some quince blossoms in a bean jar, brought from the borderland of their meadow. The shaded lamplight cast a dim radiance over Raphael's picture as it hung above their heads. The sweet, pure, girlish face of the mother seemed to look down into theirs pleadingly, and her hands seemed to clasp the little child with a warm, human clasp. Alice drew the attention of the girls to it, and the way the soft light fell across their faces. As they looked they seemed to forget time; and the centuries that rolled between them melted for a moment into the "infinite

azure of the past." Mary seemed to be a living, sweet, and womanly presence in the room, holding a child out to them. They did not understand the meaning of it that night or the next; but when the first days of July came, with an overpowering heat that was phenomenal even in the crowded city, and in its wake stalked the shadows, blacker than the smoke, of fever and death, they began to read the meaning better, and saw a child held out to them in every little sick or wearied one they met in the crowded alleys and streets down near the wharves.

It was Alice, as usual, who worked quietly and said little, who understood the meaning first. One night, when she came across the bridge, she led a little child by the hand. She was pale and thin, and had that pitiful, old look on her face which one sees only in faces of children who live in the crowded and squalid quarters of great cities. Alice had found her in an attic room, in one of the

most crowded of the big tenements which stood in behind one of the largest of the foundries. She had been ill, yet her mother had to leave her every day to earn the day's bread. At first the little thing hardly knew what to do when she found herself sitting on the grass under the trees by Alice's side; but soon a sense of glad possession came over her. She began to pick the buttercups and to run about in the tall grass. "Mary's own medder!" she exclaimed; "Mary's own pretty flowers!"

"How she does enjoy herself!" said one of the girls, as they sat watching the child play. "And the pity of it is, there are so many more where she came from who would enjoy it, too."

"Plenty more of them, indeed," said Alice, "to share our meadow."

"Old Mr. Welcome might not like us to fill the meadow with children," said one, more cautious. So Alice, to make quite sure, went and asked him. He said the meadow was theirs for the summer, to do what they liked with it. They might even rent it for Barnum's show, if they wanted to. He probably would not have made so rash a statement, however, if he had not regarded himself as measurably safe from such an infliction.

The next night a few more children came with Alice, and by the end of the week every girl of the Madonna Club who crossed the bridge led a child by the hand. In another week the children needed no invitation; they knew the place, and came there in steadily increasing numbers every night. After awhile, on Sunday afternoons, their fathers and mothers and baby brothers and sisters came with them, and the meadow looked as if they were really waiting for Barnum's show; and once or twice during the summer the girls clubbed together and served lemonade and cake in the rustic house. At first the children who came there did not seem to know how to play, or they

were too rude, pulling the daisies boisterously; but there were enough for all, and every night during the summer they carried flowers back into the smoke in their little dirty hands. Those evening hours brought color into their cheeks and health and renewed vigor to their bodies. As for Mary, their first "child," she looked ruddy and brown, so the Madonnas named the meadow after her, and also after Mary the Mother, who hung in their club room, holding a child out to them, and called it "Mary's Meadow."

The club room on Calvert Street was never open now except on rainy nights, and every evening found them across the river with the children. All this time they had not the slightest idea of benevolence. They were very poor themselves, and, like most poor people, were generous. They simply shared their meadow with the children. Mr. Welcome would sometimes wander into the field and watch them playing. He was certainly getting

ample payment in his own coin, — plenty of girls' laughter and children's voices, to say nothing of screams and shouts.

Once a lady in a grand carriage, driven by what the children called a "perliceman," stopped it in passing, got out, walked a little way down the bank from the road, and calling one of the children, asked him what they were doing.

"Please, marm," answered the little boy, very dirty and ragged, "this be 'Mary's Meadow,' where us children come and play every night."

"Who owns the field?" asked the lady.

"The Madonnas," answered the boy, and they be regular bricks, they be."

Then one of the older children ran up the bank after Willie, and explained all about the Madonnas, and who they were.

The lady got into her carriage again, and it rumbled over the bridge and turned up a side street, — the quickest way out of the smoke, — to reach the other city, of beautiful homes. So, she thought to

herself, as she lay back on her silken cushions, there were girls who called themselves "Madonnas" down in (what she had carelessly called all her life) the "slums," and into whose depths she had seldom penetrated because she had a vague idea of its being dangerous. She quite forgot, in her smooth, well-regulated life and unruffled experience, that it is not alone the narrow alley-way and crowded street that leads to destruction; that, in fact, a broad road has been emphatically spoken of as leading there, and that it was the one road shared, alas! in common by some inhabitants of both cities.

She went away, shortly afterwards, to spend August in a fashionable hotel by the sea, and to take the air at stated times under a red parasol on the beach; but her one glimpse of the "Madonnas" and their children had been a revelation to her, for they, spite of poverty, seemed to have retained that lost art of enjoying life simply, — a simplicity of which she,

like so many American women, had lost the keynote. Her thoughts all summer had a way of turning to "Mary's Meadow," and the Madonna Club. Best of all, these thoughts ripened into something afterwards. It was, in fact, the beginning of those of the beautiful city sometimes going down into the city of narrow ways and blackened pavements, not alone to help, but to learn something of life and work, of self-sacrifice, and even joy, from the "Madonnas of the Smoke."

V.

AS the summer passed, the girls could n't help realizing something of the good they were doing. One evening Alice carried a little cripple across the bridge and laid him down on the grass where he could pick the flowers within reach. He was so happy he kept singing to himself a song he had learned at a Mission School of a Sailors' Chapel, near the wharves. It was something like this:—

"Guide thy lambs, O Jesus, Guide 'em all de way, To de happy medders, Far, far away."

At first Alice hardly understood the words he was singing until he said, as she took him up in her arms to carry him home,—

"Happy medders ain't far away no longer, be they?"

Thus the days passed warm, yet bright and breezy, in "Mary's Meadow," - black, hot, and sultry in the city of great foundries. The twilights grew shorter. The fuzz began to turn brown on the tall catand-nine-tails that grew by the brook, and they began to pick, in place of white violets, the maiden's tress of August. Still the little feet pattered across the bridge in the sunset light, many a bare foot longing for the cool lush grass. Then they would all gather together and watch the lights grow bright on the other side of the river, and the church towers and chimneys stand out like silhouettes against the sky, then fade into indistinctness, as the shadows of this life will fade in the light of a more perfect one when we stand, some day, on the other shore.

Thus the vision of all that was bad and unlovely in the life of the streets faded and died away from the eyes and ears of the children. They heard bird voices. They looked up into the sky with no

dense cloud between themselves and heaven. They picked flowers and carried them back to their garrets. What had these Madonnas of the Smoke done, all unconsciously, by only sharing their meadow with the children? They had brought back color to their cheeks; they had taken the sorrowful old look from their faces; they had given them a part of their heritage in their Father's—the good God's—beautiful world of color, of sound, and light; they had carried in every little child, even as Mary the Maiden Mother did of old, the Divine Child in their arms.

THE END.











